

Castlemaine Naturalist

September '96
Vol 20.8 #226



Carnarvon Gorge National Park Q'ld

Is it worth the visit, I began to wonder as we drove inland 450 kms from Gladstone - the last hour over rough, unsealed and diversionary gravel roads - to be greeted in a rather cursory, abrupt fashion at the Rangers' Office when allocated a site in the camping area filled by what seemed half of Victoria touring in caravans and pop-up trailers.

But then the magic of the place began to take over, perhaps the information office had a change of staff, certainly half the hundred or more caravans pulled out the next day and the rest seemed hidden away in groves. On the walks it seemed the exception rather than the rule to bump into other people and those we talked to showed similar interests and could share bird sightings or special knowledge.

And what a sensible idea - they have done away with on-site rubbish bins; visitors are now required to take it away with them. But, be warned! Robber barons haunt the camp sites. The first encounter was at sunrise when Pied Currawongs insisted on walking along the tent ridge pole to hasten breakfast, and then Kangaroos moved in the moment bread appeared, shouldering you aside to take their spoils; finally the Kookaburras lined up to watch you cook bacon then snatched it betwixt hand and mouth. It didn't seem reasonable for signs to say "Don't feed the animals" when they helped themselves! It was a relief to escape up the gorge to peace and freedom from the wildlife.

The 30 km Gorge with its 10km main track and side walks fanning out to points of interest forms only a small part of the total Park which covers the still mainly inaccessible Consuello Tableland and the Great Dividing Range. Over millions of years Carnarvon Creek has eaten through the soft sandstone that forms the vertical white cliffs of the escarpment which can be seen across the flat central Queensland grasslands from over 100 miles away. The creek flows all year and with its narrow side tributaries offers cool shade through much of the day, giving life to ancient remnant rainforest palms, shrubs, ferns and mosses. Above the gorge is the drier sclerophyl tableland with grassy

open ironbark forest not dissimilar to our own backdoor.

Everything about the Gorge is thought-provoking, from its towering walls tinged with light, to the lush vegetation, the constant calls of birds, the hidden pools and the twenty rock crossings. The dominant trees of the Gorge are the White-spotted gums growing alongside Cabbage Tree palms with an understory of ferns, hibiscus and bottlebrush. *Zamia* palms and King ferns (*Angioptens erecta*) dating back 500 million years survive as relic species from a much wetter era in isolated moist pockets. Along the creek bed grows the River She-oak (*Casuarina cunninghamiana*) and above the banks is a mix of *Euc. saligna*, Sandpaper Fig, Grey Gum, Flooded Gum, Morton Bay Ash, with its tile patterned bark, Turpentine Tree, Swamp Mahogany, and Rough-barked Apple.

The birds got most of our attention and the Park compiled list runs to 168 species but the sightings worth remembering include:

Australian King Parrot, Pale-headed Rosella, Variegated Fairy-wren, Red-backed Fairy-wren, Lewins Honeyeater, Grey and Pied Butcherbirds, Pheasant Coucal, Figbird, Squatter Pigeon, Blue-faced Honeyeater, Black Kite, Peaceful Dove, Cockatiels, White-throated Warbler, Rose Robin and a company of Apostle birds

Chris Morris

Summer in the United Kingdom

The timing for our U.K. trip was definitely out. They were still recovering from their second coldest winter in 300 years, and this was reflected in the temperatures and rainfall from mid-may to late July. This affected the flora and fauna to such an extent that I think there would be a good market for Alan Reid's Timelines Calendar over there!

We played tourists in fondon for the first three days and were completely enthralled by it all. The age, size and architecture was amazing. From the immensity of St Pauls Cathedral and the grandeur of the Tower Bridge to the real life trip around the Monopoly board by open top double-decker bus.

London was a blaze of colour, with the predominant blooms being tulips, stocks, daffodils and snowdrops. The birdlife was quite good in the parks and gardens with Robins, Chaffinch, Magpies and a variety of tits present. Also present were the cute Grey Squirrels always looking for a handout.

Scotland was magnificent. From the Border Counties to the Highlands it was steeped in history, castles, towers, lochs and breathtaking scenery. Parts of the hill country were completely isolated, unfenced and untamed, the vivid green pastures interspersed with

rippling streams and clotted with Highland sheep and lambs. Wild deer and goats ranged the slopes and a giant stag silhouetted against the skyline with snow-covered crags beyond was an unforgettable sight.

We managed to fit in quite a lot of birdwatching and were pleasantly surprised to discover such a wide variety and so many colourful birds. We counted a total of 80+ species including some with the wonderful names like Dipper, Goldcrest, Yellowhammer, Gooseander and Ruddy Duck.

The wildflowers were also great; violets, pansies, primroses, poppies Bluebells and Larkspurs. We were too early for Heather. Rhododendrons also grow wild along the roadsides.

The Inverewe Gardens on the north-west coast of Scotland are magnificent. The weather conditions are influenced by the warm Gulf Stream, resulting a garden of shrubs and trees from the world over, inc. Australian Eucalypts and Rhododendrons from Africa, Burma, China etc.

Start saving your pennies now, Chris, if you plan to fish the Salmon rivers when you go over - a prime beat on the Tweed can cost up to \$2000 per day or for a week each year for life, just \$80000.

The Antrim Coast of Northern Ireland was fascinating with quaint old villages and very friendly locals. Even the birds were extra friendly. We were having a cuppa in a little cafe when in the back door hopped a little chaffinch which proceeded to clean up the crumbs from the kitchen floor. The quiet bays had a character all of their own, and an Ulster Fry breakky at an Irish B&B is something to behold!

Overall we saw quite a few wild animals including Red and Grey Squirrels, Pine Marten, Stoat, Hedgehog, Deer and Weasel. A great trip, but it made us more aware than ever of what a great country Australia is.

Maureen and Ken Dredge

Swift Parrot Survey

Only a few went out on Saturday August 4 for the second part of this year's Swift Parrot Survey. There were lots of honeyeaters at the quince tree spot at Gower, but no Swift Parrots. The group then drove on to the Red, White and Blue mine area for lunch. Again there were lots of honeyeaters, and then, there in the Iron Bark area were 7 Swift Parrots. They can easily be mistaken for Lorrikeets, but their long tails and bright red flash under the wing gives them away.

Verbal report from E.P.

Sandon Bird List, July 1996

Maned Duck	Striated Thornbills
Pacific Black Duck	Red Wattlebird
Little Eagle	Yellow-faced,
Brown Falcon	Yellow-tufted,
Masked Lapwing (nesting)	Fuscous,
Galah	White-naped and
Sulphur-crested Cockatoo	Tawny-crowned(19/7)
Crimson Rosella	Honeyeaters
Eastern Rosella	Scarlet Robin
Kookaburra	Golden Whistler (imm)
White-throated Tree-creeper	Grey Shrike-thrush
Wren	Grey Fantail
Spotted Pardalote	Willie Wagtail
Striated Pardalote	Australian Magpie
Weebill	Grey Currawong
Brown,	Australian Raven
Buff-rumped,	White-winged Chough
Yellow-rumped and	Silvereye (flock)
	Susanna Starr

August Outing

The Spring Gully walk on August 10 seemed appropriate in name with the sun out, the wattle exploding and no rain or wind in sight after weeks of winter. Nine of us started and six walked through to Fryerstown in a leisurely fashion, birding along the way and taking our time over a thermos of tea at the end to enjoy the warmth of the day. The list built up slowly without large numbers of birds showing despite the ideal conditions. Ken and Maureen, just back from Britain, had to be dissuaded from looking for 'Yellowhammers' in hedges!

List for the afternoon -

Superb Fairy-wrens	Welcome Swallow
Grey Shrike-thrush	Wedge-tailed Eagle
Restless Flycatcher	Silvereyes
Australian Raven	Grey Fantail
Striated Thornbills	Yellow Robins
Spotted Pardalotes	Flame Robin
Striated Pardalotes	Scarlet Robin
White-plumed Honeyeater	Fuscous Honeyeater
Yellow-tufted Honeyeater	Yellow-faced Honeyeater
Brown Falcon	Ground Thrush
White-winged Choughs	Crimson Rosella
Kookaburra	

Chris Morris

Remember, Fri 13 is the last chance to apply to camp at Alan Reid's property at Yea, on Sat Sun Oct. 12 & 13. Among activities will be mist netting, and many orchids will be out on the property. Chris Morris has the main details, and will furnish directions and programme to those who have made a booking.

Angair Wildflower Show

is on again on the weekend of September 21,22 at Anglesea.

Extracts from articles in "Volunteer", the newsletter of the Threatened Bird Network, Vol. 1 July 1996. (The Network, was established by the RAOU and ANCA, and aims to link and strengthen the actions of bird species recovery teams around Australia and, in particular, to encourage community participation in urgent conservation tasks.) -

Glossy Black Cockatoos

(Kangaroo Island Sub-species)

This winter's breeding attempt is looking the most successful for years with 13 chicks hatched, possibly due to possum control (Kangaroo Island has densities of Brush-tailed Possums similar to that of New Zealand) whereby nest trees are protected by tin collars and nest boxes placed away from connecting trees so that possums can't climb up and across.

Helmeted Honeyeaters

Captive breeding for the season '95/'96 was the best since the program began in 1989 with nine birds having raised offspring by January. Staff at Healsville sanctuary have shown considerable ingenuity in fixing chips in eggs with spare shell and nail polish...

Swift Parrot Winter Survey

Survey results: despite over 100 observers participating, only one bird was seen on the first survey weekend of April 27-28 (at Kingower, 40 km NW of Bendigo). ... Since this time over 200 birds have been seen in Victoria, and there is a flock near Sydney and at West Wyalong. Sightings in Victoria have been: Chiltern (c.100), Werribee (c.20), suburban Melbourne (c.40), Mandurang/Diamond Hills south of Bendigo (c.60), Whela near Kingower (c.10) and Boweya near Wangaratta (c.70)

ASSISTANCE NEEDED

A National Survey of Australia's Birds of Prey

The rabbit is now thought to be an important part of the diets of Australia's 24 diurnal raptor species, and thus the release of the calcivirus in the last year raises concerns about the effects of reduced numbers of rabbits on several of the species: declines in populations with decreased breeding success and some degree of "prey-switching".

The RAOU and the Australian Raptor Ass'n conducted a nationwide

survey - the BOP Watch Project - between 1986 and 1990, before the release of the caliviris. It involved birders counting raptors while driving along rural roads at normal speeds. The time taken, speed, road travelled and other variables were recorded on a simple standard data sheet. This information can now be used to compare new information now being sought since the introduction of the virus. This project will use the same techniques as the first BOP Watch, and will run from July 1996 to June 2000.

BOP Watch needs the assistance of competent birders to carry out the necessary roadside counts. If you are willing and able to help in some way please see Chris Morris. He has survey sheets available, and can give you more information if you need it.

The Monk Plant List, Oct 95

In October last year the Club went for a "Ramble" on the Monk, and Margaret Willis who was leader for the day made out a list of plants to look out for. There is no formal outing to the Monk this year, but if anyone decides to go out there, and it's a really worthwhile outing, it would be a good thing if you could add to the list.

Plants to look for -

- Black Anther Flax Lily (*Dianella revoluta*)
- Bulbine Lily (*Bulbine bulbosa*)
- Chocolate Lily (*Dicopogon strictus*)
- Early Nancy (*Wurmbea dioica*)
- Wax-lip Orchid (*Glossodia major*)
- Pink Fingers (*Caledenia carneae*)
- Leopard Orchid (*Diurus maculata*) (one that needs to be studied and put into its new species)
- Common Billy Button (*Craspedia glauca*)
- Golden Everlasting (*Helichrysum viscosum*)
- Yam Daisy (*Microseris scapigera*)
- Blue Pincushion (*Brunonia australis*)
- Tall Sundew (*Drosera macrantha*)
- Gorse bitter-pea (*Davisia ulicifolia*)
- Sarsparilla (*Hardenbergia violacea*)
- Primrose Goodenia (*Goodenia blackiana*)
- Pink Bells (*Tetratheca ciliata*)
- Tall Rice-flower (*Pimelea linifolia*)
- Creamy Stackhousia (*Stackhousia monogyna*)
- Cat's Paw (*Grevillea Alpina*)
- Sweet Bursaria (*Bursaria spinosa*) (Should also be checked as to species)
- Hedge Wattle (*Acacia paradoxa*)
- Magenta Storksbill (*Pelargonium rodneyanum*)
- Also native ferns, mosses and lichens.

Observations

- * Many wattles were out in the Kaweka Reserve on the day of the last general meeting. A collection of 14 different specimens at the meeting weren't the full total. F.B. (Kaweka is always worth a visit, especially in spring. Ed.)
- * A Blacktailed Native Hen was seen at Joyces Creek. S.S. Also some seen at the Kennedy Memorial between Campbells Creek and Yapeen. C.M.
- * The Cockatoos are again looking at the Galah's hollows at North Castlemaine, but they are not suitable as there is no landing platform. The older pair of Galahs in particular are very affectionate at the moment. The younger ones now have lost their grey "dusting" and have assumed adult plumage. R.M.
- * Just a couple of kilometres west of Crowlands two Swift Parrots flew alongside the car at a distance and for a time that made identification easy. This is Red Gum parkland, so perhaps they are begining to move prior to emmigration to Tasmania for the Summer? R.M.
- * It's been suggested that W.W.III might be starting in Fryers Road, Chewton! There is a tree in the back yard with two hollows, one on each side of the tree at different levels. A pair of Wood Ducks own the lower hole and the upper one on the other side of the tree is claimed by a pair of Kookaburras. Ravens have been bullying and chasing the Kookaburras, and at other times the Kookaburras bully the Wood Ducks, who are quite prepared to defend their hollow against all odds! L.R. (I don't like anyone's chances of raising young as the Kookas will take young birds and the Ravens will take eggs or young birds. Ed.)
- * Wood Ducks standing on a chimney at the corner of Kennedy and Doveton Streets - looking for nesting hollows? B.M.
- * Forktailed Kites again at Ravenswood. One was seen to swoop down after a little dog near the house. A child drew the attention of the family to a Frogmouth sitting on the children's swing at the same house. B.E.
- * Yellow-faced Honeyeaters and Spinebills are busy in the still-flowering Ironbarks at Little Bendigo, and two Spotted Pardelotes were seen working in the bark under the tree - nest building or hunting insects? C.M.
- * There were plenty of rosellas in the garden in Berkley St., but few smaller birds. K.T.
- * An Australasian Bittern was seen on a tidal creek at Golden Sands just south of Caloundra in Queensland, which is about the northernmost limit of their range. There were bulldozers working nearby and helicopters quite close, all making a lot of noise. The Caloundra Shire has the worst record in Australia for environmental destruction, and next year this little tidal creek will just be part of the wealthy "development" of the area, all opulent concrete houses and immaculate lawns. M.O.

C. F. N. C. PROGRAMME

N.B. Excursions leave promptly at times stated.

General Meetings are held at Continuing Education, Templeton Street.

* Note - Bookings for the trip to Alan Reid's property close on Sept 13. Chris. Morris will have details for those who are going, inc time of departure.

- Wed Sept 11 Working Bee pulling Cape Broom. Meet 9am, cr. Mary St and Froomes Road. Bring thick gloves.
- Fri Sept 13. Grey Crowned Babblers and Swift Parrots, their future in our woodlands. Chris Tzaro, speaker. 8.30pm, Cont. Ed.
- Sat Sept 14 Lockwood Forest. Leader E. Perkins. Leave CHIRP 1.30 pm sharp.
- Fri Oct 11 Raising Box/Ironbark Awareness. Charlie Sherwin, Vic. Nat Parks Ass'n. 8.00pm Cont. Ed.
- Sat, Sun Oct 12 & 13 Alan Reid's property, Burns Road, Yea. See note inside.
- Fri -Sun Oct 18 - 20 VFNCA campout at Myaring reserve. Details in August newsletter.
- Sat Nov 2 Festival Walk, Kalimna. 10am. See Festival brochure for details.
- Sat Nov 9 Dead Horse Gully Walk. 1.30pm. See Festival Brochure for details.
- Fri Nov 15* Catchment and Land Protection Strategies for our Region. Shawn Butters, speaker. 8pm Cont Ed. *Note change of date due to Castlemaine Festival.
- Fri Dec 13. Members and Visitors Night. 8pm Cont. Ed.
- Sat Dec. 14. Discovery walk from Shire boundary to Baringup along Carisbrook/Baringup road, (approx. 5-6km). Leave 27 Doveton St. at 10 am. Take lunch, drinks, etc., and wear a shady hat, boots, thick pants, gaiters or such. Leader E. Perkins.

Committee: C. Morris (Pres.), G. Broadway (V.P.), M. Willis (Interim Sec.), B. Envall (Treas.), K. Turner, R. Mills (P.O. & N/L Ed.), E. Perkins, M. Oliver, B. Maund, J. Hewetson, M. Dredge.

Meetings:-

General - Second Friday every month (except Jan) at Continuing Education, Templeton St. at 8 pm.

Business - Held on the 4th Thursday every month (except Dec.) at 38 Campbell Street at 7.30pm. All Members are invited to attend.

Subscriptions - 1996

Ordinary Membership: single \$14 Family \$20

Pensioner/Student: Single \$10 Family \$16.

Supporting \$25

Newsletter posted: Membership + \$6

Castlemaine Field Naturalists' Club Inc.

P.O. Box 324, Castlemaine, 3450.